**Supreme Court of the United States**
**No. 25-174**
**Citizens for Fair Elections, Petitioner**
**v.**
**Federal Election Commission, Respondent**
**On Writ of Certiorari to the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit**
**Decided: June 30, 2026**

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**SYLLABUS**

**This case concerns a constitutional challenge to a 2025 Federal Election Commission (FEC) regulation, enacted under the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA), prohibiting candidates from using campaign funds for personal expenses, including childcare and travel unrelated to campaign events. Petitioner Citizens for Fair Elections, a political advocacy group, argues that the restriction violates the First Amendment by limiting candidates' ability to engage in political speech. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit upheld the regulation, finding it a permissible restriction to prevent corruption. The Supreme Court granted certiorari.**
**In a 5-4 decision, the Court reverses the D.C. Circuit's ruling, holding that the FEC's restriction on campaign funds for personal expenses unconstitutionally burdens political speech under the First Amendment. The majority finds that the ban is not narrowly tailored to prevent corruption or its appearance. The dissent argues that the restriction is a reasonable measure to protect public trust in elections.**

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**OPINIONS**

**JUSTICE GORSUCH delivered the opinion of the Court.**

**The question is whether the FEC's 2025 regulation prohibiting candidates from using campaign funds for personal expenses, such as childcare and non-campaign travel, violates the First Amendment. We hold that it does, as the restriction burdens political speech and is not narrowly tailored to a compelling government interest.**

## Background

**In 2025, the FEC issued a regulation under FECA, 52 U.S.C. § 30101, banning candidates from using campaign funds for personal expenses, defined as costs not directly related to campaign activities, including childcare and personal travel. The regulation aimed to prevent misuse of funds and maintain public trust. Citizens for Fair Elections challenged the rule, arguing it restricts candidates' ability to campaign effectively, particularly for non-wealthy candidates reliant on campaign funds for logistical support. The D.C. Circuit upheld the regulation, citing *Buckley v. Valeo* (1976) and the government's interest in preventing corruption.**

## Analysis

**The First Amendment protects political speech, including campaign expenditures, as a core form of expression. *See Citizens United v. FEC* (2010). Restrictions on campaign spending are subject to strict scrutiny, requiring a compelling government interest and narrow tailoring. *See McCutcheon v. FEC* (2014). The FEC argues that the ban prevents corruption or its appearance by ensuring campaign funds are used for electoral purposes. While preventing corruption is a**

**compelling interest, the regulation's broad prohibition on personal expenses, such as childcare, burdens candidates' ability to campaign, especially those with limited personal resources.**
**In *Buckley*, this Court upheld limits on contributions but struck down expenditure limits, recognizing that spending enhances political speech. Childcare, for example, enables candidates to attend campaign events, directly facilitating speech. The FEC's blanket ban does not distinguish between legitimate logistical expenses and corrupt misuse, failing narrow tailoring. Less restrictive measures, such as disclosure requirements or caps on specific expenses, could address corruption without chilling speech.**
**The government's reliance on public trust is insufficient. No evidence shows that allowing campaign funds for childcare or limited travel creates a significant risk of corruption. The regulation disproportionately harms non-wealthy candidates, limiting their ability to compete in the marketplace of ideas.**

## Conclusion

**The FEC's restriction on campaign funds for personal expenses violates the First Amendment. We reverse the D.C. Circuit's judgment and remand for further proceedings.**
**It is so ordered.**

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**JUSTICE THOMAS, concurring.**
**I join the majority but would go further. All restrictions on campaign expenditures, including those targeting personal expenses, are unconstitutional under the First Amendment. *Buckley* correctly recognized that spending is speech, and any limit, however justified, risks suppressing political expression. The FEC's regulation, even if aimed at corruption, infringes on candidates' rights to use funds as they see fit.**

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**JUSTICE ALITO, concurring.**
**I join the majority. The FEC's ban unduly restricts candidates' ability to campaign, particularly those without personal wealth. Childcare and travel expenses are often necessary for effective campaigning, and the government provides no evidence that such uses lead to corruption. The regulation's overbreadth violates the First Amendment's robust protection of political speech.**

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**JUSTICE KAVANAUGH, concurring.**
**I join the majority because the FEC's regulation fails strict scrutiny. The ban's broad scope, covering expenses like childcare that enable campaigning, is not narrowly tailored. The government's interest in preventing corruption does not justify restricting legitimate expenditures that enhance political speech. A more targeted approach would suffice.**

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**JUSTICE PATEL, concurring.**
**I join the majority opinion, which correctly strikes down the FEC's regulation as a violation of the First Amendment. My background in New York real estate and deal-making informs my view that regulations must foster a competitive marketplace, including in politics. The ban stifles non-wealthy candidates' ability to campaign, distorting the electoral market by favoring those with personal resources. Allowing campaign funds for expenses like childcare or travel enhances access to political speech, promoting a dynamic and inclusive democratic process. My unpredictable approach stems from a commitment to pragmatic solutions: the FEC could address corruption through transparency, such as enhanced disclosure, rather than a blunt prohibition.**

**This balance ensures a robust market for ideas without compromising integrity, aligning with the art of the deal. I support the Court's decision to protect political speech.**

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**JUSTICE ROBERTS, dissenting.**
**I respectfully dissent. The FEC's regulation is a reasonable restriction to prevent corruption and maintain public trust in elections. Campaign funds are donated for electoral purposes, not personal benefit. Allowing candidates to use these funds for childcare or personal travel risks abuse, as evidenced by past scandals. The majority's strict scrutiny analysis undervalues the government's interest, and the ban is sufficiently tailored to professional campaign activities. *Buckley* supports such limits when corruption is at stake. I would affirm.**

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**JUSTICE BARRETT, dissenting.**
**I join Chief Justice Roberts's dissent. The FEC's ban protects the integrity of campaign finance by ensuring funds are used for electoral purposes. The majority overlooks the risk that personal expenses, even if campaign-related, could be abused. The regulation's impact on non-wealthy candidates is mitigated by its narrow scope, and less restrictive alternatives may not effectively prevent corruption. The First Amendment does not require unrestricted use of campaign funds.**

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**JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR, dissenting.**
**I dissent. The FEC's regulation advances a compelling interest in preventing corruption and its appearance. Campaign funds are a public trust, and personal expenses, even if tied to campaigning, risk eroding confidence in elections. The ban's burden on speech is minimal, as candidates can seek other funding for personal needs. The majority's ruling undermines the government's ability to regulate campaign finance effectively.**

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**JUSTICE JACKSON, dissenting.**
**I join Justice Sotomayor's dissent and write separately to highlight the regulation's role in promoting electoral fairness. Unrestricted use of campaign funds for personal expenses could exacerbate inequalities, allowing wealthier candidates to exploit donor funds. The FEC's ban ensures that campaigns remain focused on public discourse, not personal gain. The majority's decision risks opening the door to abuse, contrary to First Amendment principles balanced with public trust.**

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**Judgment**
**The judgment of the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit is reversed, and the case is remanded for further proceedings consistent with this opinion.**